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# Shaped by God

Twelve Essentials for  
Nurturing Faith in  
Children, Youth, and Adults

Edited by Robert J. Keeley

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Nurturing Faith in  
Children, Youth, and Adults**

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Grand Rapids, Michigan

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# Contents

Foreword <i>Timothy Brown</i> . . . . .	5
Introduction <i>Robert J. Keeley</i> . . . . .	7
1 Wide and Long and High and Deep: Biblical Foundations of Faith Formation <i>Syd Hielema</i> . . . . .	9
2 Embodied Wisdom: Faith Formation through Faith Practices <i>Don C. Richter</i> . . . . .	23
3 Distinguishing Dragons: The Importance of Story in Faith Formation <i>Sarah Arthur</i> . . . . .	37
4 “It’s What We Do”: Faith Formation at Home <i>Elizabeth F. Caldwell</i> . . . . .	47
5 Step By Step: Faith Development and Faith Formation <i>Robert J. Keeley</i> . . . . .	59
6 Liturgy for a Lifetime: Faith Formation through Worship <i>Robbie Fox Castleman</i> . . . . .	71
7 Living Mysteries: Sacraments and the Education of Christians <i>Fred P. Edie</i> . . . . .	81
8 Beyond the Schooling Model: Faith Formation in the Educational Context <i>Marian R. Plant</i> . . . . .	97
9 No Better Place: Fostering Intergenerational Christian Community <i>Holly Catterton Allen</i> . . . . .	109
10 Exchanging Gifts: Faith Formation and People with Developmental Disabilities <i>Erik W. Carter</i> . . . . .	127
11 Growing in Wisdom and Stature: Recent Research on Spirituality and Faith Formation <i>Kevin E. Lawson</i> . . . . .	139
12 Questioning the “Right” Answers: Faith Formation in the Postmodern Matrix <i>David M. Csinos</i> . . . . .	153
Conclusion: The People of the Story of God’s Faithfulness <i>Robert J. Keeley</i> . . . . .	165
Contributors . . . . .	169
Endnotes . . . . .	173

## Foreword

A long time ago, in the early years of the twelfth century, just when the human race was beginning to scratch and claw its way out of the Dark Ages, a Cistercian preacher named Alan of Lille wrote a book. While it bore the cumbersome and uninviting title *Compendium*, every page rippled with meaning—and quite frankly ripples still. It is one of a handful of books that I treasure most. Though Alan was writing mostly to preachers, his pulsing passion for every Christian to “climb Jacob’s ladder” made it, and makes it still, a must-read for everyone.

“Jacob’s ladder” was a controlling metaphor for Alan. He imagined a seven-rung ladder mounted on earth and reaching into heaven. Each ascending rung marked still another step in attaining spiritual maturity. The first rung, as you might expect, was a sinner’s confession of sins. The second rung was a prayer for forgiving grace; and the third, the proper gratitude owed the Holy One for grace received. The fourth rung was a careful reading of Holy Scripture; and the fifth, inquiring of a more mature brother or sister concerning those parts of Scripture that were difficult to understand. The sixth rung was becoming a mentor for a brother or sister who needs assistance. The final rung was attained when the developing Christian muscled up the courage to proclaim publicly the faith he or she had acquired through the Word.

This language may seem as quaint and curious as the doilies in your grandmother’s living room, but that is more a commentary on us than it is on Alan of Lille. Growing up and becoming fully mature and faithful followers of Jesus Christ is of critical concern to the whole church. As I write this foreword, I am holding in my hand the December 10, 2009, edition of *USA Today*. The headline, “Mixing Their Religion: Many Choose Their Faith from a Spiritual Buffet,” underlines the timeliness of this book. The article goes on to outline the stunning capacity of self-identified American Christians to pick and choose their favorite religious convictions and practices from a long list of religions and to fashion a new one for themselves. If you find reports like this alarming, as I do, this volume is for you.

As the apostle Paul cautioned our sisters and brothers in the world city of Ephesus, “We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming” (Eph. 4:14).

My wife, Nancy, and I have three married children and nine grandchildren. We pray for them every day by name, often through our tears. We want to grow old knowing that they all walk in the truth. If ever following Jesus and growing into full maturity in him was easy, it certainly isn’t now. This book will help you and those whom you love in this most critical concern for every Christian.

The *Compendium* concludes with a really interesting sermon once preached by Alan of Lille titled *Ad Somnolentes*. Just in case your Latin is a little rusty, that means, “To Sleepyheads.” If you or some of the people you love have become spiritual sleepyheads, this lovely compilation on spiritual formation is just the wake-up call you need. Read it and awaken to a world of possibilities! And then pass it along as quickly as you can.

Timothy Brown  
December 2009

## Introduction

I don't remember a time when I didn't know about God. I was raised in a home where prayer, attending worship, and Bible reading were always present. It was just the way things were. That formed the foundation for my faith, and my faith continued to grow even after I left my parents' home. People and events had an impact on my faith development over the years. I can think of family members, teachers (both at church and in school), youth leaders, pastors, friends, and colleagues who have played an important role in forming my faith. The list doesn't just include people from the past, of course—my faith is still being nurtured and is still developing even now.

There are a lot of people like me—people who grew up in a faith-nurturing environment. But many others came to know the Lord later in life. Their story of faith might be more like the prodigal son or like the apostle Paul, who met the Lord in a flash on the road to Damascus. As we talk to each other about our faith stories, we see that God has brought each of us to faith in different ways. Nurturing faith, then, is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. There are many facets to growing faith in children and adults.

This book celebrates those different facets. In the chapters that follow you will hear from some of the best thinkers in the field of faith nurture. They represent a broad range of expertise from across the Christian community and across North America. As you read these pages, you'll discover the growing consensus of what effective faith nurture looks like. You'll note that each author speaks with his or her own particular voice and from his or her own particular theological background. They don't speak with one voice, but they are all voices in the same chorus.

You'll need to adapt some of the ideas you read in this book to fit your own church or denomination. It is our hope that you will see new opportunities to strengthen your ministry in ways that all the members of your congregation, young and old, can grow closer to God.



I am grateful to a number of people who were helpful in the development of this book.

- The team at Faith Alive, particularly Leonard Vander Zee, Ruth VanderHart, Jolanda Howe, and Lynn Setsma.
- John Witvliet and the staff at the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. I am blessed to be able to continue working with this fine group.
- The faculty, administration, staff, and students of Calvin College, especially my friends and colleagues in the Education Department.
- The contributors to this book, many of whom were helpful in introducing me to others who became contributors. All of them were wonderful. Thanks for your fine work on this project.
- My children, Bethany, Meredith, Bryan, and Lynnae, who are now leaders in their own churches and help me to think about faith nurture in new ways.
- My wife, Laura, who in addition to being on the editorial committee for this book is and has been my best friend and partner in ministry for over thirty years.

Robert J. Keeley  
January 2010



# Wide and Long and High and Deep: Biblical Foundations of Faith Formation

Syd Hielema

**Ask** ten people to sketch out the story of their walk with God—the story of their faith formation—and you will hear ten very different stories. Search the Bible for a systematic program on which to base faith formation strategies in the church, home, or school, and you'll be searching for a long time. But look for common threads in those stories and in Scripture, and you will find them.

In this chapter we'll discern and describe some of those common threads. As you read, I invite you to ask yourself two questions: "To what extent do these threads resonate with my reading of the Scriptures and the faith stories I'm familiar with?" and "To what extent do the faith formation practices in our church, home, or school embody these threads?" With these two questions in mind, this chapter aims to refocus teachers and parents in their callings to faith formation or to serve as a discussion guide for church or school teams as they begin another season.

We'll look at two Scripture passages, Ephesians 3:14-21 and Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and distill from them nine themes that describe the character and activity of faith formation. Some commentators refer to Ephesians as the jewel in the crown of Paul's writings because it celebrates the wonder and majesty of Jesus in such a profound yet concise manner. At the center of this letter (3:14-21) we find this intense prayer:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at

work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

I often begin my teaching year by reading this prayer with my students, adding, “This is my prayer for you and me as we journey together with the Lord this term.”

A second biblical passage that is deeply instructive for faith formation is Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

In some orthodox Jewish homes today people still nail a tiny summary of the law onto a doorframe, and a decade ago many young people wore WWJD bracelets (“What would Jesus do?”) as a reminder to follow Jesus. But the implications of the Deuteronomy passage for faith formation are not limited to literal obedience.

Four of the nine dimensions of faith formation described in these two passages above relate to the *character* of faith formation (Part 1), and the other five specifically guide us in the *activity* of faith formation (Part 2). We’re inclined to rush to specific instructions for doing things, but doing that is not rooted in the bigger picture of faith formation. It’s like a batter in baseball who swings as hard as he can at every pitch and becomes skilled at hitting those mile-high pop-ups. They do look impressive, but they don’t accomplish anything. You will notice that this chapter links these two passages to numerous other Scripture references; groups that use this chapter for Bible study may wish to spend time lingering over some of these passages.

## Part 1: The Character of Faith Formation

### Faith Formation Is Christ Dwelling Within

When we peel back the layers of faith formation one by one, at the central core we find this profound mystery: Christ comes to dwell in our hearts through faith. This reality describes the Christian life after Pentecost. The Old Testament looks ahead to this mystery (Jer. 31:31-34; Joel 2:28-29), and the New Testament describes it numerous times (John 14:16-21; 17:20-23; Gal. 2:20; 4:19; Col. 1:25-27; 3:16). The Scriptures also use evocative metaphors to help us understand this mystery: Jesus is the Vine and we are branches grafted into him (John 15:1-8); we are a temple or a house that he inhabits (1 Cor. 3:9-17; 6:19-20; 1 Pet. 2:5); we are a field in which his seed has been planted (1 Cor. 3:6-9; 1 Pet. 1:18-25); we are the body of which he is the head (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4:15-16). At the very center of our walk with God, we find the wondrous and incomprehensible mystery that the risen Lord Jesus Christ, before whom every knee shall bow, comes to live in our hearts.

What are the implications of this “indwelling” for faith formation? We need to note two. First, Christ grows within as we die to the old self and come to life in the new self. This pattern of dying and rising is a pattern of *making room*. Scripture’s clearest description of this can be found in Colossians 3:1-17. After asserting our identities as new creations in Christ (vv. 1-4), Paul continues, “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. . . . Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” (vv. 6, 9, 10). Paul then summarizes this space-making pattern, declaring, “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (vv. 16-17).

Here's an illustration of how this pattern works. We live in a culture of incessant noise and activity. Almost everyone I know is too busy and too tired. This busyness and exhaustion must be put to death if Christ is to "dwell in us richly." I love to teach groups of all ages how to be still in God's presence, to ponder/pray one verse in silence for several minutes, to write reflectively about God's leading during the day, to make room for Christ to dwell within. Faith formation requires us to look inside and ask, "What is called to die in order to make more room for Christ to enter in?"

A second implication is this: we are dealing with a reality that is out of our control and beyond our understanding. Our starting point is one of humble adoration. We are servants of this "indwelling," making space for a miracle that we cannot manipulate and for which there is no technique that guarantees success.

I once spent a year walking alongside a young man who described himself as an "angry atheist." He loved to talk about the Christian faith, and the two of us had many lengthy and deep discussions. One evening he surrendered his life to the Lord during a conversation with a young woman he'd never met before who simply listened to him and wept with him. I wept with joy when I heard the news, but I knew I could never have predicted or manipulated this outcome. Thank God that the foundation of faith formation is beyond our control!

### **Faith Formation Is Goal-Oriented**

A second characteristic of faith formation in Paul's prayer for the Ephesians points to a paradox: faith formation never ends in this life, but even so, it is goal-oriented. Paul describes the goal this way: "that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:19). Because we do not experience "arriving at the goal" in this life, it's difficult for us to imagine what that might look like. Listen to other Scriptures concerning this goal-orientation: "In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:4-6). "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet

been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

An anonymous preacher once said that we are “fossils of the future.” Just as a fossil embedded in a rock contains the dim outline of a living organism that existed many years ago, as Christ grows in us, the dim outlines of where we are headed become apparent. All of our faith formation activity is geared toward strengthening those outlines so that the world can glimpse “new creation signposts” in our lives and communities. Singer T-Bone Burnett once put it this way:

Sometimes I want to stop and crawl back into the womb  
 And sometimes I cannot tell wrong from right  
 But I ain't gonna quit until I'm laid in my tomb  
 And even then they better shut it tight.

—from “Shut It Tight”

This goal orientation has one implication for everyone who's involved in faith formation: we are to be incredibly patient and hopeful. Jesus walked the seven miles to Emmaus and then joined the two disciples for dinner before they were able to recognize him (Luke 24). God walked with Abraham and Sarah through many ups and downs until Abraham learned to trust God and obeyed the command to sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen. 12-22). Each of our faith journeys is a “jagged line” of ups and downs, but just as God patiently walks with us towards maturity in Christ, we patiently and hopefully walk with others, keeping our eyes fixed on the goal.

### **We Are Formed into “The People of the Story of God's Faithfulness”**

The Ephesians and Deuteronomy passages quoted earlier in this chapter are two tiny excerpts from the grand story of God's faithfulness, and understanding them well requires seeing how they fit into the entire story. Moses continues the Deuteronomy passage by saying, “When the LORD your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did

not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (vv. 10-12). In other words, the commandments you are called to obey are not just random laws dictated by an arbitrary King; these commandments form you into the people who live inside the story of God’s faithfulness.

The freed Israelites continually complained and wanted to go back to Egypt. They considered the story of Egypt’s food supplies more attractive than the story of God’s liberating faithfulness (Num. 11; 20:1-5), and their character and lifestyles fit more with the story of Egypt than with the story of God. As one commentator pointed out, after God took his people out of Egypt, God faced the more challenging task of taking Egypt out of his people.

When television first became popular in the 1950s, commercials were thirty-second logical arguments for buying a particular product. Those commercials were not all that effective. Then marketers discovered that a thirty-second short story featuring the product in the lives of its characters was much more powerful. They discovered a biblical truth: people are shaped by stories. And that is why the Scriptures contain hundreds of stories. Woven together, all those stories tell the one great story of God creating and redeeming the world.

Faith formation always occurs at the intersection between two stories: the story of God and the story of our culture. If we do not identify both stories, the story of our culture will hinder and choke our growth as a people shaped by the story of God’s faithfulness, just as thorns choked the sower’s seed (Mark 4:7, 18-19). Faith formation intentionally shapes us inside the story of God and exposes the falsehood of the stories of our culture.

### **Faith Formation Is Bathed in Prayer**

Paul’s words in the Ephesians 3 passage are not so much a *teaching about* faith formation as a *prayer for* faith formation. Imagine a stage with a large circle of light coming from an overhead spotlight. All of our faith formation activities take place inside the circle of God’s



presence within that spotlight. Whatever we do there, we surrender to God's leading and working in ways that are far richer than we can ever know. So every time we drive home from another class or end another activity, a voice in our hearts declares with Paul, "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen" (Eph. 3:20-21).

## Part 2: The Activity of Faith Formation

From the Lord's perspective, faith formation is not first of all a program but a 24/7 life walk: God is forming us all the time, and the activity of faith formation is always happening. Therefore, our efforts to understand this activity always have a dual dimension: we're trying to understand something the Lord is always doing, and we want to replicate its dimensions in our specific programming. With that in mind, we'll explore these five dimensions.

### Faith Formation Takes Place "Together with All the Saints"

Take a moment to name four people who have played a significant role in your own faith formation. Recall the various ways in which they've blessed you: their character, lifestyle, piety, words of encouragement and challenge, the ways they loved you through both good and hard times. The Lord's poignant observation concerning Adam—"It is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18)—also applies to faith formation. *We need each other* to grow in our faith. Just as the Hebrews were told to remember the mighty cloud of witnesses who encouraged them to fix their eyes on Jesus and run the race set before them (Heb. 12:1-2), so God calls us to name our mighty cloud and know that we are part of the cloud that blesses many others.

Paul reminds us that faith formation takes place together with *all* the saints. So I encourage youth pastors to form leadership teams that include at least one grandparent. Recently friends of ours had

a newborn baby with Down syndrome. After listening to their coming to terms with this and praying with them, our pastor told them, “I know that your child will bring tremendous blessings to our congregation.” He recognized that our walk with God is deepened and enriched when a wide variety of God’s children walk together.

Picture the past year of faith formation in your own life and in the lives of those closest to you. Have there been regular opportunities for meaningful interaction between people of various ages and life experiences? Do you get to hear the testimonies of God’s goodness and the realities of human struggle in your worship? Are guests invited to tell their stories? Does your church bring people together for service projects who may not “naturally” work side by side? How have you experienced faith formation “together with all the saints,” and how might this togetherness be enhanced?

Moses’ teaching in Deuteronomy adds another dimension to this theme: faith formation involves “all the saints,” but the family plays a special role. The church is called to *supplement and support* faith nurture in the home, but because many homes are harried and stressed, the church often *replaces* the calling of the home instead. One of the tasks of churches (and Christian schools) is to ask, “How can we partner with parents in faith nurture activities? What challenges do they face, and what can we provide to encourage them to work through these challenges?”

### **Faith Formation Involves Lifelong Maturation**

Whenever I try to picture Paul’s challenge to grasp “how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,” I imagine a three-dimensional shape that stretches above the clouds, into the depths of the oceans, and beyond the horizon in all directions. In this life, we never fully comprehend the vastness of Christ’s love for us, and therefore faith formation never ends. As an elderly apostle in prison, Paul makes the same point in a very different way:

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming

like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:10-14).

It must have been very encouraging for the believers in Philippi to hear their chief teacher and mentor describe his own need to continue maturing in Christ, even as he dared to say to them, “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice” (Phil. 4:9).

When churches, homes, or schools tacitly communicate that children and teens are in the midst of faith formation but that the adults have “arrived,” everyone’s faith formation suffers. But that’s what happens when we gear almost all the faith formation programming to those under twenty-five, when we identify the younger ones as the ones with questions and the older folks as the ones with answers, when we rarely acknowledge the struggles and confusion of adults over twenty-five. I’ll never forget the teen who said, “One of the teachers who helped me the most was quick to say, ‘I don’t know’ when I asked him a difficult question about the Christian faith. He’d say, ‘I’ve struggled with that question too, and this is where my struggling has taken me, but I can’t give you a neat and tidy answer.’ He was like an older brother walking alongside me, and that was very encouraging.”

Picture the faith formation activities and assumptions in your community and ask yourself, “What tacit messages does this picture send to our community about lifelong faith formation?”

## Faith Formation Is Paradoxical: Knowing Love That Surpasses Knowledge

Our three children came into our family through adoption. Our youngest spent the first seven months of his life with a foster family; during the adoption process we spent quite a bit of time with that family. About a month after he moved into our home, my wife and I sent the family a card that said, “Thank you for loving him so that he knows what it means to be loved. The gift you gave him has blessed him tremendously as he is adjusting to our home and family.”

Faith formation involves “knowing love that surpasses knowledge.” In discussions about faith formation, people are apt to say something like this: “Too often church education programs tell us a great deal about God without bringing us into relationship with him.” In other words, faith *information* adds to our pool of knowledge about God; faith *formation* reshapes our heart to receive God’s love more fully. Jesus makes a similar distinction when he says to the Pharisees, “You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you possess eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life” (John 5:39-40). They wanted knowledge without relationship. More accurately, they used their knowledge to stifle relationship.

Because this formation/information contrast is so prevalent in church education today, some people assume that information about God is at best irrelevant and at worst is actually a hindrance to growing a deeper relationship with him. But that assumption has no biblical basis whatsoever. We have received the story of God’s faithfulness to us woven through the Bible’s 1,189 chapters—chapters that demand high levels of biblical literacy and careful study. If this story is to form us, surely we are called to digest and appropriate a great deal of information. Why else would so much of the Bible’s teaching be focused on correcting misinformation? Information about God is not the center of faith formation, but it is indispensable in coming to know how wide and long and high and deep is the love of God.

Before our three children joined our family, my wife, Evelyn, and I sought to learn as much as we could about their lives. This information became a support that strengthened our love for each child. Similarly, faith formation is focused on knowing and receiving God's love; knowing the shape of God's heart and the many ways he has been faithful supports our experience of that love. What faith formation activities have helped you to strengthen your love of God? What do activities that strengthen love look like?

### **Faith Formation Requires Spiritual Disciplines**

We walk in God's presence every moment of our lives (Ps. 139). Although God is always at work forming us, we are often blind to his formative presence. And in our blindness we live on a spiritual "autopilot." In this passage it's as if Moses is saying, "Wake up! Surround yourselves with reminders of God's character and faithfulness. Remember that you're called to live in a way that's consistent with who God is." Today we call these regular wake-up calls "spiritual disciplines." We engage in these activities to declare, "I want to become more like Christ."

Participating in worship and attending church education classes are spiritual disciplines, as are daily prayer and Scripture reading, practicing generosity and hospitality, promoting justice, accepting people on the margins of society, receiving God's gifts with thanksgiving, fasting—the list could go on and on. All these are part of a larger fabric of spiritual disciplines, the fabric of "hands and foreheads, doorframes and gates" that combine to carry out the Lord's formative work.

In our churches, homes, and schools we need to ask, "What does the larger fabric look like? Where are the weak spots in the whole picture that need shoring up? What is my particular involvement within the whole picture?" A church education teacher once said to me, "Years ago my teaching was sequential; I could build on themes from week to week. Now only about half the students come each week, a different group each time. So my teaching has to be episodic: each lesson needs to stand completely on its own and can't build on previous ones. That makes teaching much more difficult."

She identified a weak spot in the fabric of spiritual disciplines, one you may be able to identify with. Perhaps many of our communities need to be (re)educated concerning the need for hands, foreheads, doorframes, and gates in our lives.

### **Faith Formation Requires Biblical Literacy**

The divine revelation Moses' audience received as he spoke the words of Deuteronomy 6 to them can be summarized as "these commandments" (v. 6), and Moses instructed the people to become thoroughly acquainted with them. Today we have the entire Old and New Testament Scriptures, and that requirement still stands. We need to be thoroughly acquainted with them. That's a daunting challenge! But our knowledge of the Scriptures grows as we gradually work at it year by year; we have a lifetime to mature toward biblical literacy.

Does it really matter in this electronic age when you can enter a word or phrase into a search engine like biblegateway.com and find whatever you need instantly? Computer programs are wonderful tools, but they can never replace the need for biblical literacy. As the Word lives in our hearts, it shapes our character, our speech, our prayers, our perceptions.

Here's an illustration of why biblical literacy matters. Many Christians are deeply moved by David's simple declaration of trust in Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd." The biblically literate believer weaves this declaration into her heart. She knows that Jesus is the good shepherd who has lain down his life for his sheep (John 10:11), and that his shepherding work took place within the profound paradox of becoming a Lamb (John 1:29; Rev. 7:17). She understands that this paradox points to the deep truth that in Christ God's power is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). And she takes to heart the reminder to feed his lambs and take care of his sheep (John 21:15-17). Biblical literacy makes room for what we might call  $1 + 1 = 3$  math: as we combine various Scriptures together, a much richer and fuller picture emerges, and we are able to discern our own place in God's story.

Because these nine biblical characteristics of faith formation are all interrelated, it is easy to summarize them in one paragraph: Our faith is formed during a lifetime of maturing in Christ. We experience his love more and more as we become more like him. Christ lives in us through his Spirit, and because we have been grafted into his body, our faith is formed together with all the saints. On the one hand, this process is a profound mystery that we surrender to God in prayer; on the other, it includes practicing a web of spiritual disciplines to make room for Christ to dwell in us. As we do so, the old self dies and the new self comes to life. This includes putting to death the false stories of our culture so that we can be shaped by the true story of God's faithfulness. The better acquainted we are with God's story, the more available we are to be transformed by it. Our love for God and our experience of God's love is deepened and strengthened when we share our knowledge about him.

Like you, I will be involved in leading specific faith formation activities this year. The picture that helps me hold these nine dimensions together is the description of Jesus walking with two discouraged disciples to Emmaus in Luke 24. He lovingly enters into their lostness, patiently walks alongside them, and immerses them in the biblical story. Finally he breaks bread with them and they recognize him. The fact that Jesus' seven-mile-long sermon was not enough to restore their faith reminds me what a mystery faith formation is! The fact that Jesus stayed with them until they recognized him reminds me to persevere, to continue sowing seeds I do not control. And when an insecure voice inside me wants quicker, more predictable results, I add these words to the Emmaus picture: "Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let your hands not be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well" (Eccl. 11: 6). Those words encourage me once again to take up the profound privilege of walking with others to Emmaus.

## Contributors

**Holly Catterton Allen** is Professor of Christian Ministries and Director of the Child & Family Studies Program at John Brown University in Siloam Springs, Arkansas. She is the editor of *Nurturing Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives and Best Practices* (Cascade, 2008).

**Sarah Arthur** is a writer, speaker, and recent graduate of Duke Divinity School presently living in Lansing, Michigan. A former fulltime youth director, she is the author of *Walking with Frodo: A Devotional Journey through "The Lord of the Rings"* (Tyndale, 2003) and *The God-Hungry Imagination: The Art of Storytelling for Postmodern Youth Ministry* (Upper Room Books, 2007).

**Timothy Brown** is President and Henry Bast Professor of Preaching at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. He is also the author of *Witness Among Friends* (CRC Publications, 1989) and *Let's Preach Together* (CRC Publications), as well as a contributing author in *The Church for All Ages* (Alban, 2008).

**Elizabeth F. Caldwell** is Associate Dean for Advising and Formation and the Harold Blake Walker Professor of Pastoral Theology at McCormick Theological Seminary. She is author of *Making a Home for Faith: Nurturing the Spiritual Life of Your Children* (United Church Press, 2007), *The Shelter, Nurture and Spiritual Fellowship of God's Children* (Geneva, 2006), and *Leaving Home with Faith: Nurturing the Spiritual Life of our Youth* (United Church Press, 2003).

**Erik W. Carter** is Associate Professor in the Department of Rehabilitation Psychology & Special Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is the author of *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, & Congregations* (Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2007).

**Robbie Fox Castleman** is Associate Professor of Biblical Studies and Theology at John Brown University in Siloam Springs, Arkansas. She is the author of *True Love in a World of False Hope* (InterVarsity



Press, 1996), *Faith on the Edge* (InterVarsity Press, 1999), and *Parenting in the Pew* (InterVarsity Press, 2002).

**David M. Csinos** recently completed a Th.M. in Christian Education at Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education in Richmond, Virginia. In addition to his academic pursuits, he has been a staff member in children's ministry in a number of churches in southern Ontario, Canada.

**Fred P. Edie** is Assistant Professor of the Practice of Christian Education at Duke Divinity School and Director of the Duke Youth Academy for Christian Formation. He is the author of *Book, Bath, Table, and Time: Christian Worship as Source and Resource for Youth Ministry* (Pilgrim, 2007).

**Syd Hielema** is the Chaplain and Associate Professor of Religion at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario. He is a member of the Faith Formation Committee for the Christian Reformed Church in North America and is the author of a number of articles on faith nurture.

**Robert J. Keeley** is Professor of Education and Chair of the Education Department at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He is the author of *Helping Our Children Grow in Faith* (Baker, 2008) and coauthor of *Celebrating the Milestones of Faith* (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2009).

**Kevin E. Lawson** is Director of the Ph.D. and Ed.D. programs in Educational Studies at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University, in La Mirada, California. He is author of *How to Thrive in Associate Staff Ministry* (Alban, 2000) and serves as editor of the *Christian Education Journal*.

**Marian Plant** currently serves as Associate Professor and Schauffler Chair of Christian Education at Defiance College in Defiance, Ohio. She is the author of *Faith Formation in Vital Congregations* (Pilgrim, 2009).

**Don C. Richter** is the Associate Director of the Valparaiso Project on the Education and Formation of People in Faith. He coedited *Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens* (Upper Room Books, 2002) and is the author of *Mission Trips That Matter: Embodied Faith for the Sake of the World* (Upper Room Books, 2008).